

Optional Additions in Translation

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Abstract: Optional additions in translation are necessary not for the correctness of the sentence but for the correctness of the text. We call them optional because if do not carry them out, the sentences of the target text may be grammatically correct sentences, but the text as a whole will be clumsy and unnatural. Paper will discuss the influence of optional additions on readability of translated texts.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin my lecture with a question paraphrasing a famous Orwellian sentence from "Animal Farm": is it true that "One word is good, but two words are better"? Is it true that translations are always longer than originals? And if it is true, should we welcome this phenomenon or not?

The view that translations are always longer than originals is one of the oldest intuitive reflections on translation. To justify or reject such intuitive reflections on translation is one of the most challenging tasks for translation theory.

It was Shosana Blum-Kulka (1986), who gave the first systematic look at this phenomenon introducing the term "explicitation hypothesis" in 1986. Explicitation is viewed by Blum-Kulka regardless of differences between the languages as *inherent* in the process of translation.

In this case the higher degree of explicitness in translated texts could be explained by one of the most general features of all translations, which is totally independent from language combination or direction of translation: by the necessity to formulate ideas on the target language, that were originally conceived in the source language, that is by the difficulties on the way from thought to language form, if there is an other language form in between.

As I will speak only about the additions, it should be mentioned that addition is not the only device of explicitation. Addition is one of the tree main devices of explicitaion listed by Candace Seguinot (1988):

- (1) "something is expressed in the translation, which was not in the original;
- (2.) something which was implied or understood through presuppositions in the source text is overtly expressed in translation;
- (3) or an element in the source text is given greater importance in the translation through

focus, emphasis or lexical choice."

In this paper I will not discuss the second and the third device, that is the semantic explication and the explication through emphasis, only the simplest additions, when we find something in translation, what was not found in the original.

OBLIGATORY AND OPTIONAL ADDITIONS

Obligatory additions in translation

The first type of additions, we call "obligatory" additions, since if we do not carry them out, we will not have grammatically correct target language sentences.

Obligatory additions are dictated by the structural differences between languages. The most obvious cases of obligatory additions are caused by the so called "*missing categories*". As there is no definite article in Russian, and there is in Hungarian and English, all translation from Russian into English and Hungarian will contain a lot of pluses for this very simple reason.

The next obvious reason for obligatory additions is the *analytic or synthetic* character of languages. Hungarian is a dominantly synthetic language: Hungarian nouns have no prepositions but they have long inflected case endings, which include the function of prepositions, possessive pronouns etc. (*kertemben* = one word in Hungarian, *in my garden*, *v mojem szadu* = three words in English and Russian). Hungarian verbs also have very complex conjugations, the personal pronoun, the accusative ending and sometimes the auxiliary verb are all included in the Hungarian verb form (*szeretlek* = one word in Hungarian, *I love you*, *ja ljublju tyebja* = three words in English and Russian). As English and Russian are dominantly analytic languages all Hungarian noun and verb forms are divided in the process of Hungarian-English and Hungarian-Russian translation, and the target text will contain a lot of pluses for this reason.

Interestingly enough obligatory additions does not influence the number of words in TT in a statistically significant way. The reason for this, that additions are inseparably intertwined with omissions. Languages cannot be divided into inherently explicit or implicit languages. They can be explicit on one level and implicit on another. Hungarian for instance is implicit on phrase level (*synthetic noun and verb forms*), but explicit on sentence level (*finite clauses*). Russian and English are explicit on phrase level (*analytic noun and verb forms*), but implicit on sentence level (*non finite clauses*). Therefore, additions on one level will go together with omissions on another level.

Translating from English and Russian into Hungarian we carry out a lot of obligatory omissions on phrase-level, and a lot of obligatory additions on the clause-level. Translating from Hungarian into English and Russian we carry out a lot of obligatory additions on phrase-level and a lot of obligatory omissions on clause-level. The result will be a kind of "delicate balance".

Optional additions in translation

The next type of additions we shall call "optional" because if we do not carry them out, the sentences of the target text may still be grammatically correct, but the text as a whole will be clumsy and unnatural. Optional additions are necessary not for the correctness of the sentence but for the correctness of the text.

Optional are for example the additions of connective elements for the improvement of cohesion links at the beginning of sentences or clauses, or the additions of emphasizeers for improved topic-comment relations in the middle of sentences etc.

The beginning of sentences for example is a very sensitive spot from the point of view of

optional additions, and we can always find a lot of additions (and of course also omissions) there.

A very important addition for example in translations from Hungarian into English and from Russian into English: the addition of a subject at the beginning of the English sentence. The very complex Hungarian and the moderately complex Russian verb forms make it possible to construct sentences without a subject, which is not possible in English. The addition of a subject is an obligatory addition, dictated by the structural features of English, but the choice between the different possible subjects (personal pronoun, common noun, proper noun) is already optional. This kind of additions we call *textual* additions.

Optional additions are also the *pragmatic* additions, which can be explained by differences between two cultures, between generally shared knowledge of the members of different cultural communities. Recognizing, that the target language audience does not share the same historical, geographic and cultural knowledge as the source language audience, translators often have to give explanatory translations. For the target language audience the simple mentioning of the name of a village, river, food or drink characteristic for the source language community does not mean anything. The name may be well known for everybody in the source language community, but totally unknown for the target language audience. In this case instead of *Maros* the translator should write *river Maros*, *reka Maros*, instead of *Fertő* - *lake Fertő*, *ozero Fertő*.

Textual additions can be explained by the differences that exist between languages concerning their text building strategies and stylistic preferences, while the *pragmatic* ones by some of the more general features of the translation process. They are called "optional", because the translator has several options to choose from. Optional additions on one level are not necessarily intertwined with omissions on another level (as it was the case with obligatory additions), thus the number of words can be undoubtedly increased in the process of translation.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

In the second part of my paper I would like to speak about the relationship between the frequency of optional additions and the readability of translated texts. The experiment, I will speak about, was carried out at the Miskolc University in order to test the influence of additions on the readability of translated texts.

Our hypothesis was that the frequency of additions has a positive effect on the readability of translated texts.

The readability of any text, not necessarily translated ones, can be tested by several methods like cloze test, speakability test and subjective assessment of the style. (Very interesting experiments has been done in this field by Puurtinen 1992). Investigating readers' reactions to several alternative translations of the same original is one of the most traditional methods in translation-quality assessment.

My test group consisted of 100 second year students of English and German at the teacher training courses of the University of Miskolc. They received two Hungarian translations of the same Russian text. The source text did not play any role in the experiment, the students were not requested to compare the translations with the original. The original Russian text was not submitted to them at all.

Participants received two Hungarian translations of the same Russian text. One translation was published by the "Móra" publishing house (further referred to as text 'M'), while the other translation was published by "Századvég" publishers (further referred to as text 'Sz'). Both translations were made by professional translators, and both were more or less of good quality.

The history of the "Yeltsin-papers"

It is not usual for texts of little or no literary value to come to us in more than one translation simultaneously. Therefore, when just this happened this year with a rather large corpus of Russian texts, that were published by two competing Hungarian publishers in two different translations, it seemed worthwhile to take a closer look. All the more so, as the texts themselves were of very special interest; a batch of hitherto secret and hidden KGB documents, relating to the history of the Hungarian uprising in 1956.

The "Yeltsin-papers" - so called, because Russian President Yeltsin brought them to Budapest on his state visit last year, as a sign of good-will and reconciliation - amount to a well-sized paperback volume and are now in the archives of a research institute.

The publisher - "Századvég" (which translates as 'Fin de Siecle') - is one of the hundreds of new publishers, that sprung up after 1989 in Hungary, this one being different from most as its roots go back to old 'samizdat' days. It must have been a decision 'per se' for the President of the Republic, the recipient of the documents to give them to this particular publisher.

Everybody in the publishing house worked overtime to get the book out as fast as possible, as it promised to be extraordinarily successful both intellectually and financially. It came as a bombshell when a couple of days before "Századvég"'s publication date another publisher brought out a basically identical volume, containing the same "Yeltsin-papers", plus a couple more.

This other publisher – called "Móra" – is one of the few surviving old, state-owned houses, originally a publisher of juvenile titles, who procured the documents through the good services of two Russian, or rather Soviet experts on Hungarian matters, who had easy access to the KGB archives once they had been opened at least partly. They had beaten to the files Yeltsin himself. This is the short summary of the history of the two translations. It promised to be rather interesting to check them against each other.

The two teams of translators

"Századvég" – full of young people, fresh out of university and the 'samizdat'-underground, hand in gloves with the intellectual opposition of the defunct, old regime – looked for translators among their own university professors and renowned literary translators, some of them well known for their heretic thinking.

While "Móra" – full of seasoned old editors, who have seen no few politico-literary tempests in their own time – true to the character of the house, employed a team of experienced translators of old "Soviet" texts; incidentally, all of them men, while the other book was translated by an all-women team.

The ladies' team produced a chiselled text, not altogether devoid of certain literary pretensions, in other word, an "intelligent" text.

The other team worked obviously under instructions to translate the KGB documents as closely as possible within the limits of the differences between the two languages and indeed, their Hungarian sounds rather "Russian", or "Soviet", rather. It is written in the kind of crude, flat and unsavory bureaucratese one would associate with their probable authors.

The two translations' differences

As I have already mentioned that both translations were made by professional translators, and that both were more or less good. The main difference between them was in the number of

words. The "ladies' team"'s translation (text 'Sz') was dramatically longer than the "gentlemen's team"'s translation (text 'M'). The translation of a randomly chosen Russian document we tested, contained 375 words in the "gentlemen's" translation and 420 words in the "ladies"' translation.

As both translations contained grammatically correct sentences the additions in text 'Sz' were all optional additions. The following types of optional additions were to be found in text 'Sz':

- (1) addition of connective elements at the beginning of sentences,
- (2) addition of connective elements at the beginning of clauses,
- (3) addition of emphasizees for improved topic-comment relationship,
- (4) pragmatic additions to facilitate the identification of certain streets, etc. in Budapest, and political institutions,
- (5) the use of full names of institutions instead of abbreviations,
- (6) explanatory additions to military terms,
- (7) seemingly unmotivated additions probably due to "stylistic habits"

Thus the main difference between the two translations was that 'Sz' translation was more explicit, contained a lot of optional (textual and pragmatic) additions and explicitations. On the other hand 'M' translation was less explicit and contained only the obligatory additions.

The results of the experiment

In the first part of the experiment the students were asked to give their general impressions about the two texts. They received a questionnaire with two questions:

- (1) Is there any difference between the two translations?
- (2) Which translation do you think is better?

After describing their general impressions (students were allotted 20 minutes to this activity) they received a second questionnaire, in which they were asked to find the particular places in both translations they feel were more explicit, more detailed than in the other. In other words: they were asked to find additions in translated texts. (They were allotted 25 minutes for this activity).

In accordance with our hypothesis, text 'Sz' was judged superior by the majority of participants in terms of fluency, explicitness and intelligibility. A large number of participants were irritated by the clumsiness of text 'M'.

Our initial hypothesis were partially supported by the test results. As expected, text 'Sz' received positive comments on its naturalness and high readability, while text 'M' was criticized for being too formal and complex. 73 persons preferred text 'Sz' and only 27 text 'M'.

Additions and explicitations as markers of the good quality of the translation were mentioned by 70 participants, but the same feature was regarded to be a marker of poor quality by 7 participants. Students preferring text 'M' pointed out the conciseness of text 'M' against the wordiness and redundancy of the text 'Sz'.

Conclusion: our basic hypothesis, that explicitations will positively influence the readability of translated texts was partially verified by the results. But some of the participants called our attention to the fact that in the case of the translation of these military documents, too much fluency and readability may create false impressions concerning our originals. Therefore, in this case increasing the level of readability of the translated text by additions and explicitations, translators of text 'Sz' may have decreased reliability or authenticity.

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